

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 17

February 7, 1996, 3:50 p.m.
Page S-1052 Temp. Record

FARM BILL/Planting Requirement

SUBJECT: Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996 . . . S. 1541. Dorgan amendment No. 3451 to the Craig (for Leahy/Lugar) substitute amendment No. 3184.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 48-48

SYNOPSIS: As introduced, S. 1541, the Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996, will make sweeping changes to the Nation's farm policies. Farm programs will be reformed to allow farmers to plant what they want when they want, acreage reduction programs will be eliminated, and spending on farm programs will be capped so that subsidy payments will decline as part of a 7-year transition to full market-oriented farming.

The Craig (for Leahy/Lugar) substitute amendment would make numerous compromise changes (see vote No. 9).

The Dorgan amendment would require farmers to plant a contract commodity (wheat, corn, grain sorghum, barley, oats, upland cotton, or rice) in order to receive payments under production flexibility contracts. (Production flexibility contracts will be created by this Act as a transitional substitute to the current contract commodity price support program. Under the current program, enrolled farmers receive subsidies when the market prices for their crops fall below target prices that the Agriculture Department has set. In return for those subsidies, farmers must meet restrictions on what they plant, where they plant, and when they plant. Under production flexibility contracts, farmers will be weaned from Federal funds and Federal controls. In fiscal year 1996, the total amount available for contracts will be capped at \$5.570 billion. That amount will decline over 7 years to \$4.008 billion. Payments will be made based on 85 percent of a farm's contract acreage and on its past average production, using Farm Service Office numbers. Program participants will be free to plant any program crop, extra long staple cotton, oilseed, industrial or experimental crop, mung beans, lentils, or dry peas. Planting of fruits and vegetables will be prohibited on contract acres, alfalfa will be permitted on 15 percent of the contract acreage, and haying and grazing on payment acres will be limited to the 5 principle growing months. Farmers will also have to continue to comply with wetlands and conservation requirements. All other existing restrictions and requirements will be removed.)

(See other side)

YEAS (48)			NAYS (48)		NOT VOTING (4)	
Republicans (2 or 4%)	Democrats (46 or 100%)		Republicans (48 or 96%)	Democrats (0 or 0%)	Republicans (3)	Democrats (1)
Cohen	Akaka	Johnston	Abraham	Jeffords	Domenici- ²	Bradley- ²
Gregg	Baucus	Kennedy	Ashcroft	Kassebaum	Gramm- ²	
	Biden	Kerrey	Bennett	Kempthorne	Hatfield- ²	
	Bingaman	Kerry	Bond	Kyl		
	Boxer	Kohl	Brown	Lott		
	Breaux	Lautenberg	Burns	Lugar		
	Bryan	Leahy	Campbell	Mack		
	Bumpers	Levin	Chafee	McCain		
	Byrd	Lieberman	Coats	McConnell		
	Conrad	Mikulski	Cochran	Murkowski		
	Daschle	Moseley-Braun	Coverdell	Nickles		
	Dodd	Moynihan	Craig	Pressler		
	Dorgan	Murray	D'Amato	Roth		
	Exon	Nunn	DeWine	Santorum		
	Feingold	Pell	Dole	Shelby		
	Feinstein	Pryor	Faircloth	Simpson		
	Ford	Reid	Frist	Smith		
	Glenn	Robb	Gorton	Snowe		
	Graham	Rockefeller	Grams	Specter		
	Harkin	Sarbanes	Grassley	Stevens		
	Heflin	Simon	Hatch	Thomas		
	Hollings	Wellstone	Helms	Thompson		
	Inouye	Wyden	Hutchison	Thurmond		
			Inhofe	Warner		

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

Those favoring the amendment contended:

This bill will give payments to farmers who enter into flexibility contracts if three conditions are met: they will have to comply with conservation requirements; they will have to comply with wetlands requirements; and they will have to promise not to plant more than 15 percent alfalfa and not to plant fruits and vegetables. As supporters of this bill claim, these very limited requirements will truly give program participants "freedom to farm." However, they also will give program participants freedom not to farm. Under the current program, a participant who has a net profit of around \$235,000 is receiving up to \$40,000 of that profit as a program payment from the Government. As this bill is written, such a participant could enroll in this new program and not plant anything, and still receive that same \$40,000 based on his past average payments. We predict that if this bill is enacted in its current form, we will soon hear stories of farmers receiving \$40,000 per year to vacation in Hawaii instead of growing crops. It is an attractive option that we are offering farmers, and we are certain that many will take it. When they do, the American people will be outraged, and legitimate farm programs will suffer in the backlash. We should not make this mistake. We should close the loophole that is in this bill by conditioning eligibility for farming flexibility contracts on participants actually farming. The Dorgan amendment would close this loophole, and thus deserves our support.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

The Dorgan amendment would take a big step backwards to address a non-existent problem. Farmers should not be told when to plant or where to plant. They should make their decisions based on market conditions and their expert understanding of their own farms. The Federal Government should not be making payments to farmers based upon how much they plant, nor should it be making payments to them based upon how much they do not plant. It simply should not be involved in making these decisions. This bill will cut requirements down to a bare minimum and will provide transitional payments based not on requirements, but on the need to provide a smooth transition to market-oriented farming. A sudden ending of the existing program would be harmful to farmers and disruptive to America's food supplies. Also, total elimination of the planting restrictions immediately would cause great regional disruptions. The Dorgan amendment is not needed to prevent regional disruptions, nor is it needed to smooth the transition to market-oriented farming. Therefore, it does not follow the intent of the reforms in this bill.

In fact, it works directly against those reforms by assuming that without Federal controls, farmers cannot be trusted to plant crops. Our colleagues suppose that very successful farmers with high personal net incomes (such farmers are the participants who currently receive the maximum subsidy) will be willing to give up almost all of their income and live off the subsidy. We do not know on what historical basis they would make such an assumption. Farmers generally own acreage and machinery that is worth millions of dollars. Instead of selling their assets, they work long and arduous hours at the risky business of farming, and usually end up with low net incomes. Farmers will not suddenly jump at the chance to live off a temporary, \$40,000 per year maximum Federal subsidy (for most farmers, the subsidy will be only a fraction of \$40,000); they will of course continue farming. Frankly, we think it is a gross insult to farmers to say that the Dorgan amendment is necessary to stop them from jumping at the chance to become freeloaders.

Farmers do not need controls imposed by the Federal Government to induce them to grow crops. Such central planning controls harm agricultural production in America by preventing farmers from responding to market forces. The Dorgan amendment follows this central planning mentality, and therefore should be rejected.